

TALES FROM THE WILDFLOWER RESERVE

THE FOVS NEWSLETTER

APRIL & MAY 2026 EDITION

Friends of Van Stadens
Educate and conserve

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Supervisor's Note
From Siphs Mtengwana

Hi everyone,

I'm Siphokazi Mtengwana (Siphs), Supervisor at FOVS, and I am so glad to be sharing this first note with you.

This monthly letter is a small window into life here at the Wildflower Reserve. From the work happening on the ground with our Conservation Interns, to the quiet, powerful stories held within the fynbos itself. Each month, we will share what we are seeing, learning, and noticing, and invite you into a deeper connection with this landscape.

We hope it feels like walking alongside us. Whether you visit often or not yet, we invite you to be part of the FOVS journey.

With warmth,
Siphs 🌿



Getting to know Siphs

Siphs joined FOVS in September 2022 as part of the very first group of interns, and on 1 July 2024 she was appointed as Supervisor — becoming FOVS' first full-time employee. Today, Siphs leads conservation efforts and supports the growth of FOVS programmes here at the Reserve.

"This journey has been life-changing. Coming from a community where women in conservation are not common, I see myself as a role model and hope to inspire more young women to step into this space."

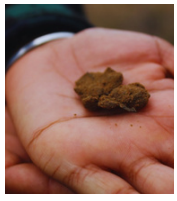
What's Been Happening

The Wildflower Reserve recently welcomed approximately 120 second-year Pedo-Geomorphology students from Nelson Mandela University for a day of field-based learning. With some of the wetlands near the entrance having dried, students were able to access and sample exposed soils. Using augers, they examined soil profiles and analysed key characteristics including texture, structure, colour, and infiltration..

The surrounding landscape further supported learning, with students observing mud cracks, iron nodules, and surface stones to better understand drainage processes and sediment movement. This visit highlights the Reserve's ongoing role as an important outdoor learning space.











Recently, our Conservation Interns visited Yellowwoods Farm School, engaging around 100 learners from Grades 4 to 7. The session explored the unique plant life of the Wildflower Reserve and unpacked why nature and conservation matter for the future. Drawing on their daily, hands-on experiences, the interns brought these concepts to life in a way that felt practical, relatable, and engaging.



Beyond the classroom, visits like this play an important role in nurturing environmental awareness, deepening understanding of biodiversity, and equipping our interns with valuable teaching and leadership skills. They also allow FOVS conservation work to reach beyond the boundaries of the Reserve by connecting with schools that may not otherwise have the resources or transport needed to visit.







We have recently celebrated a few special birthdays within our Conservation Intern team. A big happy birthday to Aviwe and Chaney, who marked their birthdays in February, and to Azola, who celebrated hers in April.

We are delighted to share that Aaliyah, one of our Conservation Interns, welcomed her baby daughter, Amyra in April 2026. We wish Aaliyah all the very best during this special time as she embraces the journey of motherhood.



Blooms to look out for


Metalasia aurea (Golden metalasia)


Leucadendron nobile
(Karoo Conebush)


Leonotis leonurus
(Wild dagga or Lion's ear)


Aloe arborescens
(Krantz Aloe)


Ericas



Sterculia alexandri
(Cape star-chesnut)

In 1848, botanist Dr Richard Chandler Prior, discovered an extraordinary tree in the Van Stadens Mountains, later named *Sterculia alexandri* after his birth name, Richard Alexander. Endemic to the Eastern Cape and listed as Rare, this species is the only Sterculia found in the Cape Floristic Region. More than 170 years later, these extraordinary trees can still be found in the Wildflower Reserve (along the River, Boulder and Forest Trails, in the gorge, at the Flower House entrance, and in the Arboretum).







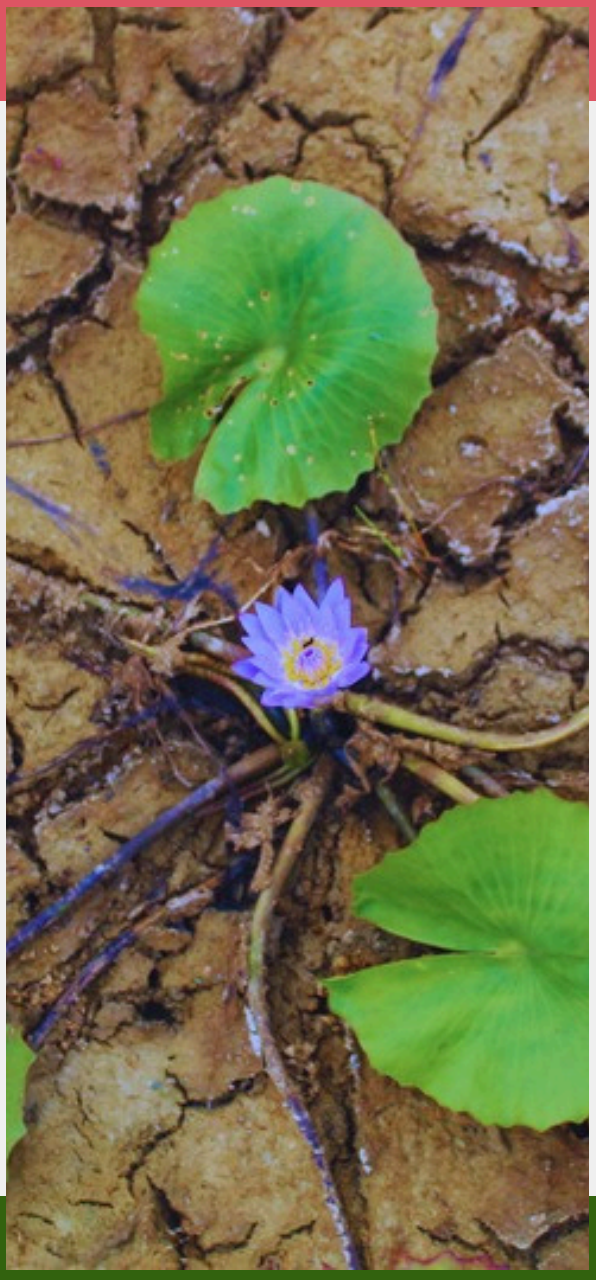
LAST WORD FROM THE FIELD

From Cracked Earth to Overflowing Dams — A Powerful Reminder From Nature.

Following a long and dry summer, much of the landscape bore the visible weight of drought. With large parts of the Eastern Cape receiving less than 600 mm of rainfall annually (and often far less in recent years) even small declines in rainfall have a significant impact on ecosystems, wetlands and water systems. Across the Reserve, dams receded dramatically, some reduced to cracked earth and dry basin floors, while sensitive wetland areas battled prolonged heat and water scarcity. Although occasional rainfall brought a welcome flush of green back to the fynbos, water remained an increasingly precious resource.

Then came the recent heavy rainfall in May. In just 48 hours, the Van Stadens area received an extraordinary 270 mm of rainfall, transforming the Reserve almost overnight. Dry dams filled once again, and even a new dam naturally formed within a previously dry wetland bed near Lily Pond. What had once been cracked and thirsty earth became saturated with life-giving water.

While the rainfall brought relief and renewal, it also highlighted the growing reality of extreme weather patterns linked to global climate change, shifting between drought and intense flooding events. These dramatic changes remind us why protecting biodiversity and conserving natural ecosystems is so important. Protected natural spaces, like the Wildflower Reserve, quietly help buffer and soften the impacts of environmental extremes. Conservation is no longer only about protecting beauty, it is about protecting systems that sustain life itself.



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